

Wellington's Naked Spots Dance have been together three years now and have just released their third piece of vinyl, a five-track EP entitled *New*.

Kate Walker (bass), Stephen Norris (guitar) and Matthew Fisher (drums) spoke to *RIU* about the EP, which was recorded at Marmalade Studios with producers Ian Morris and Chris Fleming. Kate begins:

"We gave Ian some live tapes so he would know what sort of sound we had, what we were after and the way the vocals fitted into the music."

"It represents a range of things, vocally, that we do," says Stephen. "In some songs the vocals are just instrumental, but in others, like 'New', they represent a more complete idea. In songs like 'South', the vocals are used very much like an instrument."

Kate adds, "With 'New' they tell a total story."

What are the effects at the end of 'New'?

"Originally, when we recorded it," says Stephen, "we had a groove at the end which we were going to fade out quite quickly, but we overdubbed this tape of Matthew's."

"It was more a fluke than anything," explains Matthew. "I did a tape at Varsity as part of my music course there. I carted a tape recorder around town and collected a whole lot of sounds, lifts and trains and things. I spent about 50 hours putting it on open reel and then splicing it up rhythmically, using space on a length of tape to equal a certain amount of time."

"We'd done all the recording and shoved it on a couple of spare tracks. When we were playing the music back, Ian started the tape and it seemed to fit in so well. Just by fluke, some of the sounds fitted in."

A lot of the songs seem to contain political overtones.

"They are a statement of con-

N A K E D S P O T S D A N C E



trol," explains Kate. "New" is especially so. It's about the early white settlers, colonials who round a bay to see what they think is new land, but it was really old land that had been settled long ago. Then it's about the conflict leading into the breakdown, with the tape coming in with its crashy, city noises."

How did the recording go?

"It went smoothly," Stephen reflects, "especially when compared to the thing we did last time, the *Certain Ways* EP. With *Certain Ways*, we weren't the same a month before it and we certainly weren't the same a month after, so it was a bit unfortunate."

"This time, we worked on what we were going to be doing before we did it," says Matthew. "We tried consciously to work out what we wanted. The good thing this time was working with Ian and having his knowledge to work with. It was good having someone who could stand objectively apart, but still be working with you and be interested in what you're doing."

"By working with someone like Ian you get to know the basics,"

Stephen explains. "Not effects but natural things that give depth to the music."

The finished product is being distributed by Flying Nun. I asked the Spots what they thought of the local scene.

"It's hard to see any solid movement or heart in music in Wellington," comments Kate. "It seems so dispersed."

"Most venues are too small for good sound," says Matthew. "It's fine if there is a small number of people, but then you hardly make enough money to cover the costs. If there are enough people to make it worthwhile, it's too cramped."

Why stay in Wellington?

"Because we like it here, we live here," replies Kate. "We can do things we want to do as a band quite easily. We can make good records here. We would like to be a bit more mobile and move around more, not only play Wellington, but let Auckland see what we're like as well."

And what of the future?

"After this," says Kate. "We want to try and give playing a break for a while and work a few things out, try and experiment a bit."

"With Kathy, our vocalist, going," Matthew reflects, "we won't be the same and we don't want to jump back to trying to play to people again while we're working out new ways of doing things."

"We've also got two people who play violin and viola joining shortly," Kate adds, "and we'll probably also be doing a bit more work with percussion, and two drummers and rhythm machines."

"We want to practise and write songs more consciously. Usually bands join up, throw a few things together and that is it, the sum total of their music. But we've been together quite a while now and we need to go in new directions."

Peter White



ABC guide to world domination

All young bands picture themselves as modern-day Alexanders the Great, with guitars or synthesisers as weapons in their drive for world conquest, but few groups in recent pop history have merged ambition and strategy to such telling effect as ABC. Here are four English lads in their early twenties who have just seen their debut LP, *Lexicon of Love*, enter the British charts at No 1, yet they scarcely pause to sip a celebratory champers before carefully calculating the next step towards world domination.

"We are conscious of a world market," stresses guitarist/keyboardist Mark White, sounding like the entrepreneur with a new product to peddle that, in fact, he is.

"Other countries look at the UK and see a constant stream of fads and fashions. We want to transcend that, we want to appeal to other nations. One of the reasons we signed with Phonogram was that they are a world-wide company. They have the same machinery in Greece and Spain as in London."

When they formed two years ago, ABC already had their own label, Neutron, dating back to the band's predecessor, Vice Versa.

"With ABC, we decided to aim for the sky and then looked for the best marketing and distribution offer. Technically we have complete control over our product. We have a definite idea of how to sell our records and the statements we want to make. We knew what we wanted to say with our videos and sleeves, but a lot of bands neglect that. There are more elements to a band than hitting guitar strings to form a chord."

ABC's trek to the top has gone so smoothly one could have paranoid visions of subliminal 'buy me' messages etched into the record jackets or videos, but Mark White leaves Joe Public at least some say in the matter:

"One element is completely unfathomable — the public's taste. It is down to consumer democracy, there are no 50/50 bets. When I read the charts it feels like bingo, waiting for the numbers. Right now we're going for a full house."

Such stress on marketing and packaging often suggests that the music is vapid formula fodder, but happily the ABC sound is genuinely exhilarating. Pop music has now incorporated so many elements it is difficult to imagine any totally new sounds

appearing, but ABC have intelligently blended their different influences into a distinctive dish.

The ABC recipe for Modern Dance music takes those familiar ingredients of Bowie/Ferry vocal stylings and stirs them with Motown soul and funk rhythms. The dressing is orthodox High Chic, silk suits et al, but the real icing on the cake that puts ABC a class above the electrobeat set comes with their grandiose orchestral arrangements. A couple of synthesisers won't do for these guys; they bring in complete horn and string sections that elevate lyricist Martin Fry's reflections on love to the level of Wagnerian epics.

The James Bond soundtrack music of John Barry is a reference point for *Lexicon of Love* and songs like 'The Look of Love' and 'Poison Arrow'. To White, "that is a compliment, but any resemblance is accidental. His music was made to suit a wide screen and we make music in a similar way. Our songs are tightly structured with a plot and a statement. We aim to make listening to our records an experience, a Technicolour/Panavision effect."

Cinematic references recur in ABC's work and, as with Ultravox, Spandau Ballet, Duran Duran etc, imaginative videos are a key to their success outside Britain.

Mark White agrees:

"Videos are becoming vital. They are part of the reason we are now successful in places like Australia and New Zealand which we obviously cannot fly to every week. They are our ambassadors, they express what the group is about."

As the title indicates, *Lexicon of Love*'s lyrical concerns are restricted to that perennial topic, love. Martin Fry's degree in English literature helps explain his clever use of the language, something noted approvingly by another contemporary master wordsmith, Elvis Costello.

"We tried to write songs that controverted all the moon in June, cliché, trite love songs. It is contemporary. People can relate to a bitter tale that bears a resemblance to life," claims White. While opening up the possibility of different themes in future material, he stressed that "music is not the place for overt political statements. They often come over as trite sloganeering, but music is a great medium for a topic like human relationships."

Kerry Doole



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